

Ministers, not Lords over the Faith of  
Christians, but Helpers of their Joy.

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A  
S E R M O N

Preached at

LEWIN'S-MEAD, *Bristol*,

AT THE

ORDINATION

Of the REVEREND

*Mr. William Richards,*

MAY the 22<sup>d</sup>. 1751.

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By THOMAS AMORY.

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L O N D O N

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BY THOMAS AMORY.

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## 2 C O R. I. 24.

*Not for that we have Dominion over  
your Faith, but are Helpers of your  
Joy.*



**T**H E *Christian Ministry*, where-  
ever it's genuine Purposes are  
honestly pursued, is so evidently  
fitted to promote true Religion  
and Goodness, the Improvement  
and present Happiness, as well as  
the final Salvation of Mankind, that it must in-  
gage the Esteem of all, who are Friends to Truth,  
Virtue, and Piety. It has yet so happened, that  
this Institution has sunk in the Opinion of some  
of this character; because many Persons em-  
ployed in it, have neglected the great and bene-  
ficial Ends of their Office, or have prosecuted  
Ends directly opposite; and have established  
their own Power or Wealth on the Ruins of  
Truth and Piety. In the Text, which I have  
just read to you, the Apostle *Paul* disclaims such  
an Abuse of the Ministerial Character, and

points to a chief original Design of it; and it may not be unuseful, if at this Time we take occasion from them to consider,

I. What that *Dominion over the Faith* of Christians is, which an *inspired* Apostle disclaims for *himself*, and much more for all *uninspired* Ministers of the Gospel. And,

II. In what manner *Christian Ministers* are to approve themselves, *Helpers of the People's Joy*. This will prepare the way for some *Reflections* suitable to the Solemnity of the Day.

I. Let us consider, wherein that *Dominion over the Faith* of Christians consists, which an *inspired* Apostle disclaims for *himself*, and much more for all *uninspired* Ministers of the Gospel.

God, who is a Being of infinite Knowledge and Veracity, hath <sup>a</sup> *alone* a right to our *intire* belief, and unlimited submission; and other Beings can justly claim our belief and submission only in proportion, as they partake of his Perfection and Authority.

When the God of Truth, in his great Wisdom and Goodness, was determined to restore in an extraordinary manner the Light of true Religion to a corrupted and benighted World, he chose for affecting this purpose his <sup>b</sup> *own Son*, *the brightness of his Glory, and the express Image* of

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xxiii. 9.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. i. 1. John i. 18. viii. 12.



of his Perfections, whom he sent from his *bo-  
som* to be the *Light of the world*, and to reveal  
unto Men the *whole counsel of God*. <sup>c</sup> *Unto him*  
*he gave his Spirit without measure*, confirmed  
his mission by numberless Miracles, and by  
raising him from the dead, declared him *Lord*  
*both of the dead and living*, and that he had giv-  
en unto him *all Power in Heaven and in Earth*.  
As therefore <sup>d</sup> *to us Christians there is but one*  
*God and Father of all, of whom are all things*,  
so but *one Lord* even *Jesus Christ, by whom are*  
*all things*; and whom we are to hear, believe,  
and obey in all things, relating to religious  
Truth and Practice.

He expressly commanded his Disciples <sup>e</sup> *to*  
*call no Man master*, that is, to yield to no man  
in religious matters an implicit belief and obedi-  
ence, since *one is our Master even Christ, and*  
*all we are Brethren*. And when he sent forth  
his Apostles to <sup>f</sup> *disciple all nations*, he gave  
them this charge, *Teach them to observe all things*  
*whatsoever I have commanded you*. His Apostles,  
though furnished by him with *extraordinary*  
Powers and Gifts, that they might spread and  
confirm his Religion in the world, yet were not  
to demand the belief of any, farther than they  
*proved* to them by their <sup>g</sup> *Miracles* and other  
evidences, that the Doctrines which they taught  
were indeed the Doctrines of Christ. If they  
appealed to the Old Testament, as confirming  
what

<sup>c</sup> John iii. 34. Rom. i. 4. xiv. 9. Matt. xxviii. 18.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 6. Matt. xviii. 5. <sup>e</sup> Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

<sup>f</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. <sup>g</sup> Mark xvi. 15—18. Acts ii. 32.

what they preached, their hearers, like the <sup>h</sup> noble Bereans, were encouraged to *examine and compare the Scriptures*, and see whether their Doctrine was agreeable to them, and confirmed by them. I *speake*, saith St. <sup>i</sup> Paul, *as to wise Men, judge ye what I say*. And that even the Apostles were to prove to the understandings of their disciples, that their instructions were at all times consistent with what Christ had taught, and with what they themselves had before delivered, appears from the same Apostle's declaration to the converts he had made in *Galatia*; <sup>k</sup> *If we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*.

Farther—While they preached and propagated the Gospel, they were not to *seek* their *own Honour, Wealth, or Power*, but to preach <sup>l</sup> *Christ Jesus the Lord*, and themselves the Church's *Servants for Jesus sake*. They were to *live to Christ, not to themselves*, and to endeavour that all might submit to *him* as their Lord, believe his Truths, and obey his Precepts, and be prepared for his glorious Kingdom in Heaven, and that *Christ* might be thus *magnified, either by their Life or Death*.

Agreeably to these instructions St. <sup>m</sup> Paul, when some amongst the *Corinthians* questioned his Authority, appealed to the miraculous Powers and Gifts, which he had exercised amongst them, and communicated to them.

Not-

<sup>h</sup> Acts xvii. 11.    <sup>i</sup> 1 Cor. x. 15.    <sup>k</sup> Gal. i. 8.  
<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 5.    Phil. i. 20.    Rom. xiv. 7.    <sup>m</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 4.

Notwithstanding this a *Judaizer*, a *false Apostle*, continued his Opposition, pretending that *St. Paul* contradicted the Law of *Moses*, and taught differently from the other Apostles, particularly *Cephas*; and took occasion, from *St. Paul's* not coming to *Corinth*, as he had proposed, to insinuate, that he was not able to maintain his Doctrine. Upon this the Apostle in a solemn manner calls God to witness, that it was *compassion* not *fear* that kept him still at a distance; <sup>a</sup> that *to spare them, he came not as yet unto Corinth*. He delayed it, that he might give the Deceiver and his party time to consider and repent; and that he might not be obliged to maintain his Authority and Credit as an Apostle, by inflicting miraculously some such Punishment upon them, as he had before inflicted on <sup>o</sup> *Elymas the Sorcerer*, when he maliciously opposed the Truth. But then apprehensive, lest this declaration might appear like assuming an undue Authority, as if he would *terrify* them into a belief, without *clearing up* their *Objections*, and giving them full proof, that he had taught the Truth, he adds in the Text, *Not for that we have Dominion over your Faith*. That is, according to *Mr. Locke's* judicious Paraphrase, “ Not that I pretend to such  
 “ an Authority over your Faith, as to require  
 “ you to believe what I have taught you, without coming to you, when I am expected to  
 “ maintain and make it good. For it is by that  
 “ Faith you stand,” are qualified for the favour

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. i. 23.

<sup>o</sup> Acts xiii. 8.



your of God, animated to christian Virtue and Obedience, and prepared for Happiness. " But  
 " I forbore to come, as one concerned to pre-  
 " serve and help forward your Joy, of which  
 " I am tender ; and therefore declined coming  
 " to you, whilst I thought you in an estate  
 " which would require a severity from me  
 " which would trouble you."

He therefore assumes a *Dominion over the Faith of others*, who requires their belief *without* or *beyond* evidence. And he *lords* it over the subjects of *another*, who endeavours to establish his *own* Authority, not the Authority of the *Sovereign* who employs him ; and to serve his own Interests, not the Interests of his Prince.

If then *St. Paul*, vested as he was by Christ with extraordinary Powers, and peculiarly guided by his infallible Spirit, declined all appearance of claiming an Authority, which might be abused to *spiritual* Tyranny, much more ought *uninspired* Ministers, who for the main are on a level with their Christian Brethren, to decline all such appearances, and still more the thing itself. We shall do this, *my Brethren in the Ministry*, if we honestly attend to the following Observations, and practise accordingly.

1. If Christian Ministers would avoid the guilt of *arrogating* to themselves <sup>p</sup> *Dominion over the Faith* of their fellow Christians, they must *teach* nothing for Doctrines or Commandments of *Christ*, but what after a careful and

impar-

impartial Inquiry they find *he* hath taught, either by *himself*, or by his *inspired* Apostles. He is *Lord* over the Faith and Practice of others, whose Doctrines are upon *his Testimony* and *Authority* received as divine Truths, and his Directions as divine Commands. *Christ* is thus *our Lord*. When he returned to Heaven, he left us in the Records of the New Testament the Truths and Precepts which he had delivered in Person, or by his infallible Spirit in his Apostles, to be the *Objects* of *Faith*, and *Rules* of *living* in his Kingdom to the End of the World. And these, together with the *inspired* Writings of the *Old Testament*, to which our Lord gave the *sanction* of *his Authority*, are able to make us *wise* to *Salvation*, through *Faith* in *Christ Jesus*. *Are profitable* for *Doctrine*, for *Reproof*, for *Correction*, and *Instruction* in *Righteousness*; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. As far as these are honestly studied, believed, and obeyed, *Christ* is believed, and obeyed, acknowledged, and submitted to as our Lord.

But from a regard to our *own Imaginations*, or the *Prepossessions* of a Party, to recommend Doctrines and Rules of Life to the Church of God as of divine Authority, without first satisfying ourselves by a serious and impartial inquiry, that *Christ* hath really revealed and enjoined these, this is to make *ourselves*, or the *Leaders* of our Party, *Lords* over *God's Heritage*, and

B

Kings

1 Luke xvi. 29.  
ΚΑΤΑΚΥΡΙΕΥΟΙΣ.

2 Tim. iii. 15.

1 Pet. v. 3.

*Kings* in the Kingdom of *Christ*, which is by no means consistent with the character of *faithful subjects* to him. If we would keep ourselves clear of this offence, laying aside as intirely as possible all *prejudices*, we must apply ourselves to the study of the *Scriptures*, using diligently all the helps of *critical* learning in our power for discovering their real meaning, and join with these † *earnest prayers* to God, that he would lead us into all necessary Truth. It must be the language of our souls, “ I will hear  
“ what the Lord says; I will receive, teach,  
“ and obey that, and that only.”

Instead of coming to the *Scriptures* with a determined resolution to find in them the favourite Tenets of a Party, and right or wrong to draw from them proofs to countenance these, we must come with a determined resolution to discover if possible the genuine Doctrines and Precepts of Christ our Lord, in their full evidence and extent, and by these to try all the Doctrines and Commandments of Men; and to reject whatever we find contrary to our divine rule, or unwarranted by it, though it have had the sanction of venerable names; while we abide by what we discover Christ to have revealed or established, though rash and fallible men may have branded it with the names of Heresy and Error. If we act otherwise, we raise the *Heads of Parties*, to be *Lords of Faith* in opposition to Christ, and make ourselves *petty Tyrants* under them.

Nor

† Luke xi. 9.



Nor must we dethrone others merely to set up *ourselves*, and our *own imaginations*, but we must be very careful that we deliver nothing as Doctrines or Commands of Christ, which an honest Inquiry has not convinced us to have been really revealed and commanded by him. They are awful words of St. Paul, and we should keep them in constant Remembrance.

" *Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work be burnt he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire, or as a man hardly escaping out of a fire.*

2. Having thus prepared ourselves to teach the genuine Doctrines of Christ, we must desire and demand the assent or obedience of others no farther, than we can by good arguments convince them, that the things which we teach are the *Doctrines and Laws of Christ our Lord*. He who receives a Doctrine, or practises a Precept, because he is convinced it is the Doctrine or Precept of Christ, he, and he alone, is in this respect the subject of Christ, and regards him as *Lord*. If fallible men require others, whether convinced or not,

to believe or obey in deference to their Authority, they make themselves *Lords* to the prejudice of Christ, and arrogate *Dominion over their Faith*.

As to the great Doctrines therefore of *Natural Religion*, which the \* *Gospel* takes for granted, and which are the foundations of our Faith in any Divine Revelation, because these can only be proved by reasonings on the nature of things, the frame of the world, and the like; we must, by arguments of this sort, addressed to the Reason of Men, endeavour to establish in them the belief of the Being, Perfections, and moral Providence of God; of the moral and essential differences of characters and actions, and of a future state of recompences. \* *He that cometh to God, says the Apostle, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him.* As all men therefore are obliged to receive these Truths, and are † *capable* of discerning the evidences of them; all they, whom we would confirm in the faith of these, have a right to demand from us *rational* grounds for their faith. To require that they should believe, without good reasons, what we affirm on these heads, is to exalt ourselves into *Lords of Faith*, and degrade them to a level with *brutes*.

As to the Articles and Duties of *Revelation*, which we would have them receive and practise, we must, by an appeal to the Scriptures, explained

\* John vi. 44, 45. Matt. vi. 26. † Heb. xi. 6.  
‡ Rom. i. 20. ii. 14. Acts xiv. 15. xvii. 24.

plained according to the rules of fair interpretation, prove to them, that the Doctrines, which we assert to be contained in such passages of Scripture, are really taught therein by Christ, and the Precepts really enjoined by him. For any Man, or Body of Men, either alone, or assembled in *Councils* or *Synods*, to require of others to submit to his or their determinations, as Rules of Faith or Practice, without first making it plain to their Understandings, that they have determined according to the mind of Christ, is really to make themselves *Lords of Faith*, and to exercise the *Dominion* which St. Paul renounces. If the *Council* of *Nice* or of *Trent*; if a *Convocation* at *London*, or the *Synod* at *Westminster*, have determined Articles of Faith, and proved them by the Scriptures, they are to be received by all who *discern the proof*. Not for any Authority in these Ecclesiastical Bodies, but on account of the Evidence they bring with them. And where this Evidence does not appear, their *Decrees* are to be rejected as warrantably, as if they were merely the determinations of a single undignified Person.

Nor ought we, after having nobly cast off the Authority of *others* as *Lords* over our *Faith*, to assume *Dominion* to *ourselves*, by exacting Faith or Obedience merely on the pretence of our own Authority. To Reason, <sup>2</sup> *to the Law* and *to the Testimony*, all are authorised to appeal; and by these our Doctrines are as subject to be tried as the Doctrines of any others. If  
Persons



Persons do not immediately yield to our Arguments, we must not pronounce them dishonest or stupid, but carefully examine, whether we ourselves are not mistaken. And if after a review we see good reason to conclude, that we have Truth of our side, we should try whether placing our Arguments in other Lights, or offering new, taken from Reason and Scripture; whether continued kindness and candor, joined with a good Example, may not prevail over their Prejudices. *" For the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, because God may thus give them repentance to the acknowledgement of the Truth.*

Where we cannot by good Arguments convince others, to pronounce them Enemies to Truth and Goodness, is to exalt ourselves into *Lords* indeed. 'Tis claiming not only *infallibility* as to Doctrine, but such a *knowledge of the heart* as qualifies us certainly to determine, that it is a want of honesty and of love to the Truth, not a want of ability to discern the evidence, which occasions persons to differ from us. *And who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth,* <sup>b</sup> saith St. Paul. *And why dost thou judge thy Brother; and set at nought thy Brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ; who searcheth the hearts; who is the alone Lord and Judge both of the dead and living.*

3. If

<sup>a</sup> Tim. ii. 24.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xiv. 4. Rev. ii. 29.

3. If we would avoid the Guilt of usurping *Dominion over the Faith* of Christians, and in the Church of Christ, our great aim and endeavour must be, to promote the *important Ends* of *Christ's Kingdom*, not our own private Authority or Interest. The usual purpose for which Men strive to lord it over others, is the making them subservient to gratify their prevailing passions, whether the love of Power, of Riches, of Pleasure, or the like. When the Apostles discovered something of this Temper, and strove amongst themselves *who should be greatest*, in the temporal Kingdom, which they flattered themselves that Jesus as Messiah would soon erect, our Lord at once disappointed and condemned all such views, saying to them. *“ The Kings of the Gentiles exercise <sup>d</sup> Lordship over them, but ye shall not be so. He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and be that is chief as he that doth serve. The superiority at which they were to aim was, the being more abundant and successful in their labours to promote the Faith and Practice of the Gospel.*

The glory and interest of Christ our Lord are the prevalency of true Religion and Virtue amongst Men—to have numbers formed by the belief of his Gospel, and a regard to his Example, to an exalted Piety, a generous Goodness, a steadfast Integrity, and an indifference to the low Pleasures and Interests of Sense, and the animal Life, and thus prepared to be compani-  
ons

<sup>c</sup> Luke xxii. 24.

<sup>d</sup> Κυριευσιν.

ons of Angels, and happy with them for ever in the presence of God and of the Lamb in his heavenly Kingdom. By the best methods to promote these, should therefore be the great concern and business of our lives. And when a Minister is possessed with a just Sense of his Obligations to the Redeemer, of the worth of true Goodness, and the importance and value of complete and everlasting Blessedness; worldly honour, interest, and pleasure, will appear trifles, in comparison with the present honour and satisfaction of being approved of God in the faithful prosecution of these great Ends; and with the Glory and Blessedness which in the everlasting state will be the rewards of our diligence and fidelity. Such a one will easily despise the popularity and wealth to be acquired by disguising the Truths of the Gospel, by countenancing favourite errors and superstitions, or humouring prevailing vices, \* *by walking in craftiness, and handling the word of God deceitfully*; his aim, his pleasure, his study will be, *by manifestation of the Truth to commend himself to God, and to every man's conscience in the sight of God; and to save himself, and them that hear him.*

4. Our Endeavours to promote the belief of the Truths, and the practice of the Commands of Christ, must be regulated by the Rules and the Spirit of his Religion, if we would avoid the guilt of assuming *Dominion over the Faith* of others. *To the lording it over the Heritage* of

\* 2 Cor. iv. 2. 1 Tim. iv. 16.



of God, <sup>†</sup> St. Peter opposes *being Examples to the Flock*. That is, the *Overseers* of the Church must teach Christians Humility, Contentment, Moderation to the world, and other Virtues; not by usurping Authority over them; making them poor, and by temporal punishments humbling them into a submission to their dictates; but by manifesting to them the goodness and amiableness of these Virtues in their own Temper and Conduct. And according to the same Apostle, they are to advance the belief of the Gospel, not by dictating to others, and requiring implicit Faith under penalty of Excommunication, Imprisonment, and Inquisition Tortures, thus putting *them* in fear, but by being <sup>‡</sup> ready to render to every Man a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.

Under pretence that the Scriptures have not sufficiently guarded against *Heresies* in certain matters, to contrive and impose *unscriptural Creeds* as *Tests of Orthodoxy*, and *Terms of Communion*, and to ruin in their *Credit and Interests* all such, who receiving the *Scriptures* will not submit to our additional explications; this is not only to *lord* it unjustly over our *Brethren*, but to reflect also on the Wisdom and Goodness of our great *Master*; as if he either could not, or would not, reveal important Truths in a clear and satisfactory manner, but left his Gospel in want of our improvements to render it a perfect rule of Faith.

C

If

† 1 Pet. v. 3.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 15

If we endeavour to satisfy the *Reason* of others, that the Sentiments we would have them embrace are really Doctrines of Christ, worthy of God, and deserving <sup>h</sup> of all acceptance from men, by demonstrating their tendency to perfect the human nature, to animate men to all goodness, and thus to prepare them for a divine happiness; and to ingage men's obedience to the commands of Christ by *proving* clearly, that they are *his* commands, are *good* in themselves, that an Obedience to them is necessary to their present self-enjoyment, as well as to their final felicity, and that *infinite* will be the advantages flowing from obedience in the everlasting state—and if we strive to convince them, that we *heartily* believe these Duties and Virtues thus important by our *own practices*, and by an *eminency* in them render the excellence of these Virtues still more apparent and attractive, we shall thus best approve ourselves the servants of Christ, and by the methods, which he himself practised and pursued, serve his Interest, and promote his Kingdom. But without first convincing the Judgment, and ingaging the Conscience, to require and exact *implicit* Faith and Obedience, to urge men to profess what they do not believe, or to practise what they do not approve, by the *temptations* of worldly Profits or Honours; or to *terrify* them from the contrary by Disgrace, Fines, Imprisonments, and corporal Punishments—this is not only usurping *Dominion*

<sup>h</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15. Tit. ii. 10. iii. 8.

*minion* in the kingdom of Christ, but directly counteracting the great designs of it. 'Tis forcing men, by becoming *hypocritical* and *vicious*, to be subjects of <sup>i</sup> *Satan*, and offensive to God; instead of preparing them by the Love, Belief, and Profession of the Truth, and by the practice of all Honesty, Goodness, and Piety, to be pleasing to God, acceptable subjects to Christ, and partakers of that Heaven which he hath provided for such.

This may suffice to expose the evil of *domineering* over the Faith, before an Audience, who value, and *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free*; and before Ministers, whose avowed Principle and constant Practice have shown their utter Aversion to the thing, either in themselves or others. I shall therefore proceed,

II. To represent briefly one principal Part of the *ministerial Character*, comprised under these Words of the Apostle, *being Helpers of your Joy*. The following are some of the chief Instances of this benevolent Disposition and Office.

1. We are to *help* our Hearers to possess themselves of the *Joys of Faith*. There are few satisfactions equal to those which an honest Mind receives from a clear, rational, and strong persuasion, of the great Truths of Religion. Upon good grounds to know, and be assured, that Mankind and the World they behold

C 2

and



and inhabit are the productions of an *infinitely perfect* Cause, who upholds all things by his unceasing Energy, supplies and governs all his Creatures by an infinitely wise and good Providence, is the ever present Father and Almighty Friend of the righteous, the grateful, the pious, and benevolent, whom by the best methods he is training up for the perfection of Goodness and of Happiness—who notwithstanding the Follies and Transgressions of the human Race sent from Heaven *his only Son, the brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Perfections*, to save them from Sin and Death, and to conduct them to Virtue, Piety, and Life Eternal—And who will, through Christ, forgive fully all the penitent, assist and accept the sincere, and notwithstanding their many imperfections, receive them, after death, to a state of complete, divine, and never-ending Blessedness—These are Truths so great, so noble, and so interesting, to frail and dying creatures, open to numerous Evils, conscious to many Transgressions; conscious also to large and noble Capacities for Happiness, and apprehensive of Eternity; that clearly to discern the evidences of these great Truths, and to be fully assured of their Reality, inspires a Joy which exalts the human Heart, animates to all Virtue, and raises the Believer above all the Temptations of Vice, the Afflictions of Life, and the Terrors of Death.

The evidences of these Truths are as abundant, as the Truths themselves are important, and offer themselves to the serious and inquisitive

tive in a striking Light. *Ministers* therefore are to be *Helpers* of their People's *Joy*, by rendering these evidences familiar to their thoughts; and by leading them to observe the demonstrations of the Perfections and Providence of the Deity in the frame and preservation of the world, and in the continually producing and supplying innumerable Creatures; the wise adjustment of the present state as a state of Trial for reasonable and immortal Beings; and the abundant Proofs which we have, that *Jesus Christ*, who confirmed all the *Truths* and *Duties* of natural Religion, and added to them such noble Encouragements and such glorious Hopes, was indeed authorised by that God, whom he resembled in the perfect purity and goodness of his Life, and who owned his Mission while living by numberless Miracles, and <sup>k</sup> *declared him to be his Son with power by raising him from the dead*. By assisting even weaker Capacities to comprehend the Proofs of Truths so lovely and so important to all, by clearing the difficulties and objections which are raised against them, and by often recalling their attention to the reasons which support them, Ministers are to render their hearers *strong in the Faith*, and to be *Helpers of their Joy*.

2. They are to *assist* their People's *Joy*, by ministering to them from the Scriptures such a *Light* for the right conduct of Life, as shall make their whole path of duty plain and strait before them. It is an inestimable satisfaction  
to

<sup>k</sup> Rom. i: 4.

to moral Agents, who consider themselves as on their Trial for everlasting Felicity, to have a distinct and comprehensive view of their Duty, and to be rationally assured what way of acting in every part of life will render them fully approved of God, and prepare them to be happy for ever. For this purpose the <sup>1</sup> *grace of God appeared, bringing Salvation to all Men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present World; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* And the principal instances of Duty are easily discerned by every honest Mind. But to trace these *general* Precepts into all their particular branches, and certainly to discover what method of thinking and acting in every relation, and in all the varying circumstances of human Life, is most worthy our Character as Men and Christians, is of the most beneficial Tendency to others, and will most immediately dispose our own minds to enjoy the blessedness of Heaven—This is a work which requires frequent, close, and impartial reflection, and a judicious consideration of human Life, and of the different consequences from different Actions—and especially where our duty is plain, to discern it so clearly to be also our wisdom and happiness; and the pretences of Vice to present Satisfaction and Advantage to be fallacious, and her crooked and flowery paths certainly ending in disappointment and wretch-

<sup>1</sup> Tit. ii. 11.



wretchedness; as may make our adherence to our Duty chearful and stedfast. This is not an easy attainment to persons engaged in the necessary Cares and Business of Life, though scarce any thing be more important and desirable.

Ministers therefore are to help their People to the Joys of such a clear practical Knowledge, by first improving the Advantages which a retired and studious Life gives for acquiring this Knowledge from the Scriptures, from other judicious Writings, and from Reflections upon themselves, and upon human Life; and then communicating to others, what they have discovered of the *Extent* and *Obligation* of our Lord's Precepts of Piety and Goodness; which reach to the regulation of every Passion, the improvement of every Faculty, the answering every obligation of social Life, and using well every advantage for doing good: and by making them sensible at the same time, that their *Duty* is their *Interest*, <sup>m</sup> *that Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths peace; that in keeping God's Commandments there is a great reward;* and that an *imitation* of the best of Beings in Righteousness, Goodness, Purity, and Truth, will assure them of his favour here, and prepare them for a divine Happiness hereafter. And what an improvement would this give to the Joy of every well disposed Person, willing to please God, to answer in some manner his Obligations to him, to do good in Life, and prepare himself for complete Blessedness in an approaching state.

3. The

3. The Joys of a good Conscience are of the noblest kind, and *Ministers* must be *Helpers* of their People in attaining these Joys. The satisfactions mentioned under the two preceding heads are preparatory to these, and compleated in them, and nothing further is necessary to Christians becoming happy in these, but their pursuing steddily the dictates of their Faith, and their enlightened Consciences. And, *my Friends*, what Joys can equal those of a *good Conscience*? After a thorough acquaintance to stand approved to our own hearts, and upon good grounds to conclude that we are approved by God—To feel Gratitude, Love, Resignation, and Devotedness to the greatest and best of Beings prevailing in our bosoms; to be full of Faith, Love, and Subjection to the Son of God, the Saviour of the World; to be animated by the most generous Concern for the good of others; and to be conscious not only to an uncorrupted Integrity, but to a divine Benevolence, a tender Compassion, and an abounding Charity—to feel our Passions beat as temperately in regard to sensible and dying Interests and Enjoyments, as becomes immortal Beings; and our Souls with that high relish pursuing the satisfactions of Knowledge, Truth, Friendship, Goodness, and Devotion, which suits those who hope soon to be happy in the perfection of these with <sup>n</sup> *Angels and Spirits made perfect*—and to be thus qualified to look up to God with a full assurance of his Complacency, forward in Life  
with

with this pleasing certainty, that all our valuable Interests are safe under his care, and onward still to Death and the everlasting State with the noble confidence, that Death will prove our great Friend, and Eternity alone be the measure of our Blessedness. These are Joys, to assist our Hearers in acquiring which is our great Business as Christian Ministers, and for this purpose to excite them to the faithful practice of their whole duty, and to a continual progress in Virtue and Piety, by all the motives of the Gospel, by the Fear and Love of God, by love to the Redeemer, and by a regard to his Virtues, Death, and Resurrection; by the beauty and excellence of genuine Piety and Goodness; by the assurance of assistance from above in the noble attempt, and of divine acceptance; and of obtaining universal Honour and immortal Blessedness at the general Judgment—and by representing farther the amiableness and worth of these dispositions in our own Temper and Conduct; thus inviting and leading them to those pure streams of religious Joy, which run into an ocean of perfect and everlasting Blessedness. And not to multiply particulars.

4. There is the *Joy of Hope*, and we should help those who attend our Ministry, ° to *re-joice in hope of the glory of God*. The more distinct our apprehensions are of the nature and value of the heavenly Blessedness, and the clearer our conviction is of its certainty, the higher will the Joy of Hope rise in the breast of every  
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• Rom. v. 2.



one, who has <sup>p</sup> *exercised himself to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards God and Man.* Frequent and spirited representations derived from the *Scriptures*, of the nature, worth, and everlasting duration of the promised Felicity, and as distinct as our present state will allow; (wherein <sup>a</sup> *we walk by Faith not by Sight*) particularly as arising <sup>r</sup> from an immortal health and beauty, and vigor of Body, and perfection of Mind, from the brightest and largest Views of the Perfections and Works of the Infinite Eternal, still opening upon us for ever; from the glorious presence of God and of Jesus, from the most transporting sentiments of Veneration, Gratitude, and Love to them, and from their full approbation; from an intimacy with Angels, and all the redeemed, and seeing Millions of Millions as perfect and happy, as the most generous heart can wish them, exulting in their Joy and contributing to their improvement in Blessedness; from our own continued proficiency in every great and good quality, and from an unclouded certainty of our still rising higher in perfection and bliss to Eternity—such animated representations of the heavenly Blessedness, proved to be as true as delightful, from the Nature and immense Benignity of the great Father of Spirits, from the capacities of the human Soul, from the Promises, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God, and from the meetness of a Soul formed on the Precepts of the

<sup>p</sup> Acts xxiv. 16. <sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 7. <sup>r</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 40. xiii. 10. Matt. v. 8. Rev. xxi. and xxii. 1 Pet. i. 7, &c.

the Gospel to enjoy it's promised Felicity—such representations will mightily inspirit our Hearers to the practice of all Goodness, and their improvements in Goodness will naturally give them a more abundant Enjoyment of the satisfactions of a good Conscience, and thus qualify them for the Triumphs of Hope, of a clear and rational Assurance that they are *' Heirs of God, and joint Heirs with Jesus Christ.* These are Joys, which mingled with the common pleasures of life, will greatly enrich them, will render the afflictions of life scarce sensible; and at the important season, when persons destitute of this Hope sink into a dreadful Gloom and Despair, and when the whole World for Comfort will be found as nothing, will inable a Man to triumph over Death like St. Paul. *' O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory? I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of Righteousness, even Glory, Honour, and Immortality; the reward assured to a patient continuance in well doing.* Come then ye kind *ministring Spirits* and conduct me to *Paradise,* where *absent from the body I shall be present with the Lord; where is fulness of Joy and Pleasures for evermore!*

Happy they who by a life worthy of the Gospel are qualified for such divine Joys, and for such glorious Hopes, which will never make

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them

*' Rom. viii. 17. ' 1 Cor. xv. 51. 2 Tim. iv. 2. Luke xvi. 22. 2 Cor. v. 8. Psal. xvi. 11.*

them ashamed. Thrice happy the *Ministers* who have been *helpers to many* in acquiring these, who have cheerfully devoted all their abilities and influence to this generous design; who can regard remaining Life as greatly improveable for such noble purposes, and who can every day look forward with increasing pleasure to an approaching Eternity, the Joys of which will infinitely surpass all their hopes and wishes.

This Subject would afford us a variety of important *Reflections*, particularly on the notorious Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*; and of others *like* them, who exercise a cruel *Dominion* over the *Faith* of Christians, and destroy instead of helping their Joy; and on the *contrariety* of such principles and conduct to the *nature* and *design* of *Christianity*—On our happiness as *Dissenters*, in being free from all usurpation over Conscience; and on the *goodness* of our Cause, which is the Cause of religious Liberty and genuine Christianity, and founded on the *sole* Authority of Christ to be King and Lawgiver in his own Kingdom—On the benevolent and generous Design of the *Christian Ministry*; and the Esteem and Affection due to Christian Ministers, who faithfully pursue the design of their office; and the like—But I omit enlarging on these, that I may ask your patient attention to the two following Reflections.

1. What has been offered should determine the *Laity*, to assert at all times their *Christian Liberty*, and to see that their Ministers keep within the bounds of their Office; and then

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generously to encourage them in doing their duty. " *Stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.* It is your glory to be dutiful Subjects to the Son of God, as your LORD in matters of Faith and Conscience, and to him *only*. Should any *Ministers* then demand your implicit belief of their Doctrines, without making it appear to you that they are the Doctrines of Christ; or should they, under pretence that Scripture expressions are obscure or defective, impose their *own explications* of these, as *Articles of Faith*; should they make *new terms of Communion*, which Christ has not made, or pretending to a power of *opening or shutting Heaven*; attempt to persuade you, that it is not sufficient to confess your sins unto God, and by a hearty repentance, through Christ, to reconcile yourselves unto him, but that you must also confess yourselves unto them, and have their hands to your pardon—let them know, that they are not *Lords*, but *Ministers*, not your *Masters*, but your *Brethren*, while *one is your Master even Christ*; are appointed to instruct you in the Laws of Christ, not to make Laws of their own; and that you will believe and regard them no further, than they approve themselves faithful subjects of Christ our common Lord, and endeavour to promote his genuine Truths, and the practice of his Commands.

On the other hand, when you justly refuse to Ministers the Authority of *Popes*, let none of

of you assume this Authority to *themselves*, and expect that a Minister should take his religious sentiments from their dictates, and preach only what they believe, not what after his best Inquiry he is convinced Christ hath revealed. If a Minister appear seriously and conscientiously to study the Scriptures, as his rule of Faith, of preaching and of living, and it be the great design of his Ministry to assist you in heartily believing and practising the great and uncontroverted Truths and Duties of Christianity, hear candidly what he has to offer in favour of sentiments wherein he may differ from you; and if he cannot convince you, nor you convince him, agree to think differently as to these points, while you unite, and direct your main Zeal to cherish the Love of God, and the Faith and Love of the Redeemer, and to the practice of true Goodness in every Relation of Life, and your own best preparation for a blessed Immortality. And should his honest study of the Scriptures, and affectionate concern for your eternal Salvation, lead him to declare against dispositions and practices to which you may be indulgent, but which he apprehends may prove fatal to your best Interest, instead of regarding him as your *Enemy, for telling you the Truth*, consider impartially what he offers, and if he convinces you, imbrace the conviction, and encourage him as the best of Friends; who with the manifest hazard of your displeasure endeavours to save you from the greatest evils, and to promote your greatest good, your eternal Salvation,

vation. And while he devotes his Life and Labours to the discovering and promoting religious Truth, to the recommending and advancing real Goodness, to that which tends to make you most happy here, and divinely blessed for ever, \* *generously* encourage and support him, that he may pursue his good designs free from anxious Cares and distracting Wants; and let him rejoice in your Friendship who is a helper of your Joy. I speak this with the more Freedom, because it is so agreeable to the known sentiments and practice of this Christian Society. To conclude.

2. Is it, *my Brethren*, our great Concern as Ministers, to be *Helpers* of our People's Joy, to assist them in possessing themselves of the noblest satisfactions here, and in preparing their Minds for *everlasting Joys*? Let the thought of this animate our Zeal, and cheer our Labours, inspirit our private Studies, and our publick Ministrations. There is a noble satisfaction attending every Instance of Kindness and Beneficence. To wish well to Mankind therefore in their best Interests, to contribute to their injoying the most valuable Satisfactions, and to their most complete Preparation for divine and immortal Joys, must yield us exalted pleasures at present, and qualify us to be eminently blessed in that world, where Goodness will be infinitely rewarded by the best of Beings, and where to see any triumphing in eternal Felicity,

to



to whose attainment of it we have contributed, will add infinitely to our own Blessedness.

Let the excellency therefore of our Design, and the glorious Hope that is set before us, warm our hearts, and cheer us amidst difficulties, ill treatment, worldly discouragements, and slow success. Let our *Preaching*, our *Conversation*, our *Examples*, all conspire in assisting those who are committed to our Charge, to enjoy abundantly the Pleasures of a good Conscience, and of heavenly Hopes. And God grant we may each of us rejoice with them now in their continual improvement, and with them triumph in the world of Bliss, finding them *our Crown of rejoicing at the coming of our Lord Jesus.* Amen.

Y 1 Theff. ii. 19.

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